Directorate of
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Articles

Text not applicable

South Africa: Igniting A Missile Race? (S NF)

South Africa may have produced at least the solid propellant motors for the short-range ballistic missile (SRBM) launched from the Arniston Missile Test Range in July and is apparently preparing for series production of solid motors that could be used in both ballistic missiles and space launch vehicles. Such a production capability allows Pretoria to develop ballistic missiles in spite of the Missile Technology Control Regime and United Nations embargo efforts and may ignite a missile race on the African continent. (S NF WN)

Pretoria's Ballistic Missile Program

South Africa's missile development program began in 1963 under the direction of the Armaments Corporation of South Africa (ARMSCOR). Early development programs focused on surface-to-air, air-to-air, and cruise missiles. In the early 1980s, signs of preparation for ballistic missile development were observed [redacted] Two facilities for producing solid propellant, Somerset West and Irene Missile Component R&D and Production facilities, were expanded after 1983; construction began at Arniston for the test range in 1984. By 1986, South Africa had completed construction of facilities capable of producing ballistic missile-sized motors at Somerset West and, in July 1989, Pretoria launched its first ballistic missile from the Arniston Missile Test Range. (S NF WN)

In the months preceding the July launch [redacted] the question arose after the launch as to whether South Africa had launched an Israeli-produced missile or one that South Africa had produced indigenously. Ample evidence exists linking Israel to South African military programs, therefore the possibility of a direct transfer of missile components from Tel Aviv to Pretoria cannot be discounted. However, analysis [redacted] suggests that South Africa may have produced the solid motors used for the July launch. (S NF WN)

Ballistic Missile Production

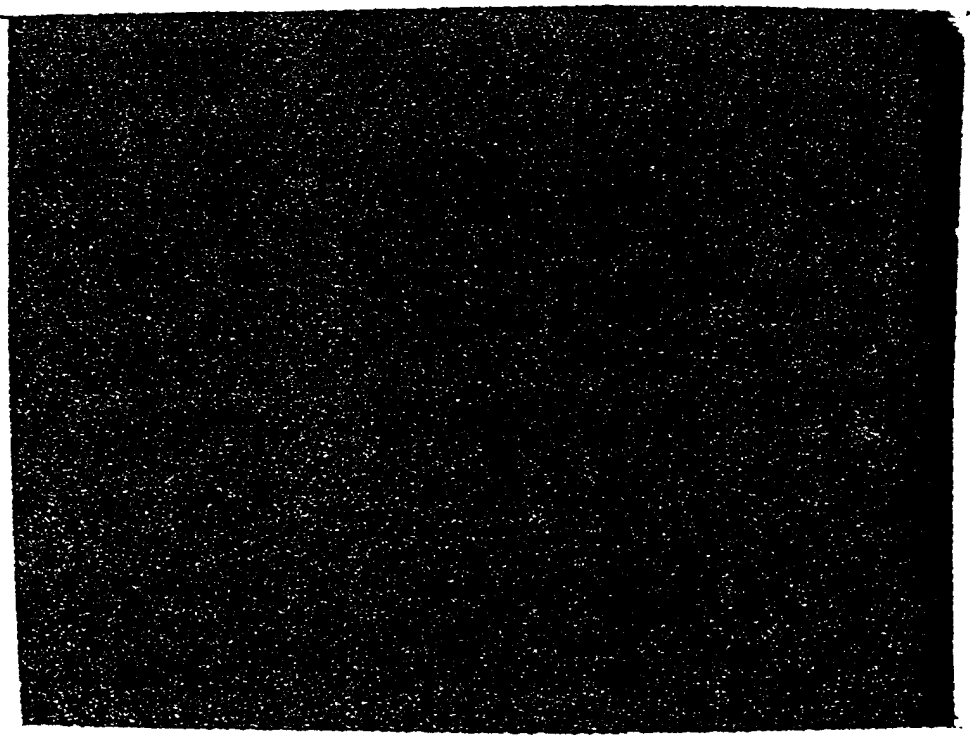
[redacted]

South Africa is preparing for series production of ballistic-missile-size motors and that Somerset West will probably be the site of this production. Although static test facilities exist at Somerset West, the Pringle Bay test facility is the only one to be identified that appears capable of testing motors of ballistic missile size — a necessary procedure for series production. (S NF WN)

[redacted]

Pages: 8

Exemptions: (b)(1), (b)(3)



Irene, which is about 15 kilometers south of Pretoria, is primarily associated with research, development, and production of tactical missiles. This facility does not appear capable of supporting series production of ballistic missile motors and is about 1,300 kilometers from the static test facility at Pringle Bay and the Armiston Missile Test Range, making Irene an unlikely location for series production of ballistic missile motors.

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Outlook

South Africa appears committed to series production of ballistic missiles. Such production will alarm neighboring African nations, who will probably seek ballistic missiles of their own to counter any perceived South African advantage.